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Chairman: Mr. HAMBURGER (Netherlands)

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 96: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION (continued) (A/51/59, A/51/73, A/51/87, A/51/120, A/51/127, A/51/138, A/51/208-S/1996/543, A/51/210, A/51/295, A/51/314, A/51/357, A/51/462-S/1996/831, A/51/375 and A/51/529)

(e) HUMAN SETTLEMENTS (A/CONF.165/14 and A/51/384)

1. Mr. N'DOW (Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II)), introducing the report of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) and the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of and follow-up to the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), said that in calling for Habitat II, the General Assembly had recognized that the management and development of human settlements might determine the fortunes and quality of life of all the world's people and that adequate preparations had to be made to face the twenty-first century.

2. The fundamental objectives of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, during the preparatory process, had been to expand global awareness of the centrality of human settlements to human progress, to make the preparatory process of the Conference one of inclusiveness and partnership, and to ensure that the Conference would find innovative, creative and viable solutions to the problems discussed. The Conference had succeeded beyond all expectations as a result of the willingness of all participants to formulate consensus positions on human settlements policy. The Conference had also succeeded despite a relatively tight budget, thanks to the contributions in cash and in kind made by Governments and other partners.

3. In keeping with its new role and responsibilities under the Habitat Agenda, and in order to meet the new challenges facing it, the Centre for Human Settlements had revised the perspective for the human settlements programme of the 1998-2001 medium-term plan to reflect the Habitat Agenda as the central organizing principle of the world's advance towards the future. The Commission intended to review its work programme at its next session to ensure an effective follow-up to Habitat II and to make recommendations to the Economic and Social Council. The Commission would also review recommendations regarding its working methods in order to ensure a deeper and more effective involvement of representatives of local authorities and civil society.

4. To be an effective agent in the struggle to improve people's lives and living environments, the United Nations must itself become a stronger and more open system that epitomized those same objectives. The opportunities for doing so were boundless.

5. Mrs. HERNÁNDEZ (Costa Rica), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, expressed support for the Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements and the Habitat Agenda and welcomed the agreements reached at Habitat II, which should lead to more secure, equitable, and viable human settlements. However,

it should not be forgotten that sustainable human settlements were a prerequisite for the survival and socio-economic development of developing countries. The challenges confronting those countries in the face of massive migration from their rural areas to urban centres were particularly serious. Top priority should be given to the eradication of poverty and the promotion of sustainable economic growth in the context of building sustainable human settlements. It was also vital to recognize the needs of women, children and young people for safe settlements and to intensify efforts to meet their basic needs such as education, nutrition, health services and the right to decent housing.

6. The follow-up to and implementation of decisions and recommendations adopted by the major United Nations conferences in recent years should be given priority by the international community. To that end, an item on implementation of and follow-up to the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) should be included in the provisional agenda of General Assembly sessions. Complete and effective implementation of the Habitat Agenda called for a review and strengthening of the role and functions of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, taking into account the need to focus the Centre's work on well-defined objectives and strategic topics. The Centre should also be provided with the financial and human resources needed to carry out its work in conformity with Conference decisions. The Group of 77 and China supported the work of the Commission on Human Settlements.

7. In order to make substantial progress in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, it was necessary to strengthen cooperation at the national, regional and international levels, including cooperation with all relevant United Nations agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions. Technology transfers and new and additional resources to help developing countries achieve sustainable development were equally indispensable. Both within and between nations, the Habitat Agenda afforded an opportunity to forge partnerships for cooperation which involved States and the whole spectrum of civil society. In that regard, the concept of partnership as a key instrument for international cooperation should be strengthened within the framework of the United Nations.

8. Ms. BROWNE (Ireland), speaking on behalf of the European Union and Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, said that adequate shelter and the improvement of human settlements on a sustainable basis were central to the achievement of the international community's shared goal of improving the quality of life of all people. However, in view of increasing urbanization, those were particularly challenging objectives. The European Union, which welcomed the reaffirmation by Habitat II of the right to adequate housing and the recognition of the obligations of Governments to enable people to obtain shelter, believed that the components of the right to adequate housing must be further defined. The broad-based participatory approach taken to negotiations at that Conference was reflective of the partnership needed at all levels in order to create the requisite enabling environment for implementation.

9. It had also been recognized at Habitat II that Governments had the primary responsibility for implementing the Habitat Agenda. Plans of action would need to be developed and/or strengthened to reflect the consensus reached in

Istanbul. The international community would, where appropriate, play a complementary role in supporting national efforts. Local authorities should also be supported in their efforts to implement the Habitat Agenda, and all appropriate participatory mechanisms, including local Agenda 21 initiatives, should be developed and employed.

10. The Commission on Human Settlements should, at its next session, review its programme of work and its working methods and make recommendations to the Economic and Social Council, in the framework of the Council's review of its subsidiary bodies. The General Assembly and the Council should also review the Commission's mandate in the light of the outcome of the Istanbul Conference.

11. The European Union attached considerable importance to adequate preparation for the next session of the Commission on Human Settlements. The terms of reference for the assessment of the Centre for Human Settlements with a view to its revitalization should be agreed as soon as possible to ensure that the assessment was completed by that session. The international community should consider together at each step how to implement the Habitat Agenda effectively and, in so doing, strengthen the focus, importance and effectiveness of both the Commission and the Centre.

12. Mr. ÇELEM (Turkey) said that Habitat II had played, and would continue to play, a vital role in creating a greater awareness of the common challenges that adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements posed in a rapidly urbanizing and globalizing world. In spite of many different national and regional positions, the Conference had succeeded in adopting the Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements and the Habitat Agenda on the basis of a broad-based consensus. Indeed, the Conference had introduced an innovative approach to partnership involving the United Nations, national representatives, local authorities, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and professional organizations.

13. The main follow-up activity to Habitat II at the national level was the implementation and further development of national plans of action. In that regard, it was essential that national committees should become permanently established in all countries. To that end, a Turkish National Plan of Action had been prepared through a broad-based participatory process, and the Turkish National Committee had evolved into an institution for monitoring the implementation of the national plan of action.

14. Progress in attaining the goals of Habitat II would ultimately depend on the full mobilization of civil society and must involve the empowerment of people and the creation of effective participatory institutions, especially at the local level. In that regard, an initiative had been taken in Turkey by the Mediterranean Academy, a non-profit foundation, and the municipality of Bodrum, to formulate an action plan for the Bodrum Peninsula. The first local Habitat conference in Turkey had been held in Bodrum from 17 to 21 October 1996 and had produced a local plan of action and a declaration. Turkey planned to carry the Bodrum experience to the international arena and to organize a regional Habitat conference in 1997 to deal with human settlements problems common to the countries of the Mediterranean basin.

15. Mr. YU Qingtai (China) said that the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, should fully respect the specific conditions of individual countries. Since countries differed in terms of their living conditions, level of development, geographic characteristics and cultural traditions, there could be no uniform standard or model for solving the problems related to human settlements. Each country should implement the Agenda in accordance with its own specific conditions and decide on its human settlements policies and objectives in the light of the Agenda.

16. The implementation of the Habitat Agenda also depended on increased awareness of the need for sustainable human settlements. Only by solving the problems of sustainable human settlements development within the framework of overall economic and social development and environmental protection would it be possible to achieve the goals of adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements in an urbanizing world.

17. Implementation of the Habitat Agenda also required effective international cooperation. While it was true that developing countries bore the primary responsibility for solving their human settlements problems, the international community, and the developed countries in particular, should endeavour to create a favourable international environment for the development of human settlements by providing sufficient financial resources and technologies to the developing countries.

18. Finally, implementation of the Habitat Agenda required effective United Nations follow-up mechanisms and action. Habitat II clearly set out the respective roles and mandates of the Commission on Human Settlements and the Centre for Human Settlements in carrying out follow-up action. Those two bodies should supervise the implementation of the Agenda, and other relevant United Nations organizations and agencies should contribute to the implementation of the Agenda in keeping with their respective mandates.

19. Mr. NG'ENO (Kenya) said that his delegation fully endorsed the statement made by the representative of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

20. The formulation and implementation of human settlements strategies was the responsibility of national Governments. The Habitat Agenda set out the programmes necessary for improving the living environment in cities, towns and villages, and also outlined the institutional framework for implementation and follow-up. The international community had an important role to play in providing new and additional resources to reinforce national efforts. Concerted global cooperation would enhance progress towards achieving the goals of the Agenda.

21. In keeping with the new objectives and priorities of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements as the focal point for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, his delegation was in favour of strengthening the role of the Centre and of the Commission on Human Settlements in order to enable them to carry out their mandates effectively at the international, regional and national levels.

22. His delegation called upon Governments to commit themselves to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, and encouraged local authorities, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, parliamentarians, the academic and scientific communities and others to participate in national plans of action. It also called upon the General Assembly to place due emphasis on the Habitat Agenda at its special session in 1997 to review Agenda 21.

23. Mr. CHOWDHURY (Bangladesh) said that his delegation associated itself fully with the statement made by the representative of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

24. Like many other developing and developed countries, Bangladesh faced problems associated with rapid urban growth. With a population of 9 million, Dhaka, the capital, had already become one of the 13 megacities of the world. The rate of urbanization in Bangladesh was 5.4 per cent a year as compared to a national population growth of 2.17 per cent, which demonstrated that rapid urbanization was irreversible. Urban areas should therefore become hubs of production and vehicles of modernization. The situation in Dhaka and other urban centres had been aggravated by the influx of people who had been displaced by natural disasters, erosion, drought and unemployment in rural areas. Appropriate national efforts, supplemented by regional and global cooperation, were needed to address those problems.

25. The Habitat Agenda offered a positive vision of sustainable human settlements in which everyone had adequate shelter, a healthy and safe environment, basic services and productive and freely chosen employment. The Agenda was a global call to action at all levels and a guide to achieving the sustainable development of the world's cities, towns and villages into the first two decades of the coming century. Habitat II had provided a unique opportunity to address in a concerted manner such issues as poverty eradication, environmental management, shelter, governance and the relief-to-development continuum, all of which had figured prominently in the objectives of the Conference. Mechanisms and structures should be put in place to facilitate access of the least developed countries to resources and technologies that would enable them to achieve the goals of the Agenda.

26. Mr. TCHULKOV (Russian Federation) said that the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) should play an important role in the implementation of the decisions of Habitat II, and should endeavour to respond fully to the growing needs for international cooperation in the areas of housing construction, the sustainable development of human settlements and the exchange of new environmentally sound construction technologies.

27. In the twenty-first century, megalopolises and cities of all sizes would become the main centres of efforts to achieve sustainable economic, social and environmental development and, at the same time, hubs of world trade and national and global partnership in the areas of industrial and scientific and technological cooperation. The Commission on Human Settlements should take account of those global factors in its work, in particular by providing information and analytical data and making recommendations to Governments on the development of national policies and strategies for the sustainable development of cities.

28. The sustainability of human settlements was largely determined by the sustainability of the technical infrastructure of cities, particularly in the areas of energy and transport. It would therefore be useful to coordinate efforts in those areas with the Commission on Science and Technology for Development and the Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and on Energy for Development, as well as with the relevant bodies of the regional commissions.

29. It was important to implement the decision on follow-up measures adopted at Habitat II. In particular, the General Assembly, at its special session in 1997, should pay due attention to the question of the sustainable development of human settlements. It was also necessary to consider the implementation of the Habitat Agenda at the 1997 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council with a view to coordinating the activities of the United Nations system to implement the decisions of the Conference. In order to establish inter-agency coordination, an item on the implementation of the Habitat Agenda should be included in the programme of work of the Administrative Committee on Coordination.

30. Mrs. HORMILLA CASTRO (Cuba) said that her delegation supported the statement made by the representative of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

31. Her delegation welcomed the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of and follow-up to the outcome of Habitat II (A/51/384), in which he recommended measures for adoption by the General Assembly with a view to ensuring the full and effective implementation of the Habitat Agenda. The formulation and strengthening of local plans of action and national programmes to achieve the objectives of adequate housing for all and the sustainable development of human settlements in an urbanizing world were essential to the success of the Habitat Agenda. The United Nations should encourage cooperation among the various organizations and agencies of the international community and donor countries with a view to providing assistance to national efforts.

32. The enormous challenges facing the housing sector and human settlements at the global level required new and more efficient modalities of international cooperation, including the dissemination of the "best practices", as well as the political will of States to adopt appropriate measures in that area. No less important was the role of the United Nations system in establishing an international climate conducive to investment in that sector, which also involved such matters as international finance, external debt and trade and the transfer of technology and information.

33. In the light of the results of Habitat II, her delegation was in favour of strengthening the mandates and functions of the Commission on Human Settlements and the Centre for Human Settlements, both of which should have at their disposal sufficient human and financial resources to monitor the implementation of the Habitat Agenda within the United Nations system and advise the Economic and Social Council. To that end the other functional commissions of the Council should incorporate questions related to human settlements into their programmes of work.

34. The forthcoming special session of the General Assembly to review Agenda 21 should devote the necessary attention to the question of the sustainable development of human settlements in the light of Member States' renewed commitment to improve the environment through the achievement of a series of objectives, including sustainable consumption and production, prevention of pollution and protection of ecosystems.

35. Her delegation welcomed the opening of the Regional Office for Latin American and the Caribbean in Rio de Janeiro, which would play an important role in the implementation of such regional programmes as urban administration, livable cities and the programme of urban and housing indictors.

36. Mr. KINNICK (United States of America) said the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) had resulted in agreements in a number of significant areas. The underlying concepts of sustainable development, partnership and enablement had been upheld and expanded. Significant commitments had been made to promote the safe use of lead, decriminalize homelessness, provide opportunity for persons with disabilities to participate fully and equally in human settlements development, and use appropriate indicators in monitoring progress in achieving the Habitat Agenda.

37. At the national level, the Habitat Agenda called for Governments to implement their own national plans of action, which should be carried out with the full participation and cooperation of different levels of government, with leading roles played by the private sector, civil society and individuals. The active involvement of the diverse spectrum of participants at Habitat II had confirmed that the most productive role Governments could play in promoting sustainable human settlements development was to empower individuals and local communities to solve their own shelter problems.

38. The Habitat Agenda proposed actions that the international community could take to support national efforts. At the international level, implementation should take place in a manner consistent with the Habitat Agenda. Within the United Nations, the Economic and Social Council had the primary role in overseeing United Nations system-wide coordination. The Commission on Human Settlements and its subsidiary body, the Centre for Human Settlements, would play important roles in that regard. In addition to overcoming significant management and financial challenges, the Centre must focus its efforts on areas where it could achieve concrete success in a cost-effective manner.

39. Mr. GÖTZ (Germany) said that the challenge for the near future was successfully to utilize the economic, social and ecological potential of cities, yet to avoid doing so at the expense of rural areas. Accelerated urbanization, often viewed as a cause of problems, should be recognized as an opportunity. The international community, by redirecting its focus to sustainable development, would be able to overcome the false dichotomy between economic, social and environmental measures and instead view such measures as integral parts of a single whole. Economic growth was therefore necessary to meet the mounting needs of a growing population, in particular in the developing countries. However, economic growth must not be pursued at the expense of the environment and social stability, for without sustainable development in the cities, long-term positive economic development would prove impossible.

40. For Habitat II to succeed, Governments must build upon the political momentum and the decisions adopted at the Conference to bring about change in the global political agenda. The Habitat process had become a vital element of peacemaking, for only when individuals lived in decent conditions could problems stemming from resource-distribution conflicts be solved and the basis for peaceful coexistence be created. That tough challenge must be tackled at the international, national and regional levels, and the strategies devised must be coordinated. In particular, legislators and administrators must strive to avoid friction among themselves. Governments were responsible for promoting well-developed self-government and financial responsibility at the local level and for facilitating international cooperation between communities. Non-governmental organizations would also play an increasingly active role, since it was through them that the interests of the individual were most clearly expressed. A workable Centre for Human Settlements was crucial to meeting the challenge at hand.

41. In conclusion, he noted that the Urban 2000 conference to be hosted by the World Congress for Urban Planning in Hannover, Germany, in the year 2000 would continue the dialogue on sustainable urban development at a higher technical level than the debate in Istanbul, with the aim of devising models for worldwide sustainable development. Agenda 21, the Habitat Agenda and the Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements would provide the basis for its work. The ultimate goal was the adoption of a declaration on urban development in the twenty-first century.

42. Mr. N'DOW (Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II)) said that the connection between peace and sustainable living environments was a crucial theme which must figure prominently in the follow-up to Habitat II and the future mandate of the United Nations in the field of human settlements. Unlivable human settlements were unsustainable in economic, social and political terms and bred competition and conflict, in some circumstances leading to a breakdown in the social order, with potentially disastrous results. The situations in Rwanda and Bosnia were cases in point.

43. Ms. AMOAH (Ghana) said that, in keeping with the accepted obligation that Governments had the primary responsibility for implementing the Habitat Agenda, her Government had enhanced the roles of its relevant ministries to enable them, inter alia, to facilitate and coordinate the implementation of environmentally sustainable, healthy and affordable human settlements projects. Measures to ensure the sustained empowerment of District Assemblies had been adopted to enable those local bodies to implement development and human settlement programmes. Legislation had been enacted enhancing the delivery of science and technology inputs to solve human settlement problems and providing for better coordination of research activities in agriculture, health, medicine, industry, social science and the environment. A new secretariat had been established specifically to coordinate the implementation of the Istanbul Declaration. Her delegation urged Governments to establish and strengthen national mechanisms to guide, coordinate and monitor actions taken to implement the Habitat Agenda and called for broad-based participation at the national level as well as coordination and partnership with appropriate subregional, regional and international organizations.

44. Her delegation renewed the call made in the Habitat Agenda for a redefinition and resuscitation of the existing processes and structures of cooperation with a view to evolving better approaches to address the challenges confronting the international community. It urged the speedy implementation of the Agenda, particularly the provisions aimed at: the creation of an enabling international environment through efforts to solve the trade and debt problems of developing countries; the coordination of macroeconomic policies at all levels; increasing the stability of financial markets; enterprise development; capacity-building in developing countries, particularly African countries, least developed countries and countries with economies in transition; the promotion of cooperation to address the impact of international migration; the promotion of strategies to ensure effective participation of local governments, non-governmental organizations and other actors; and the adoption of policies to develop the private sector. The Commission on Human Settlements and the Centre for Human Settlements should be provided with the human and financial resources they needed to carry out the functions assigned to them under the Agenda effectively.

45. Mr. PEDRAZA (Bolivia), speaking on behalf of the countries members of the Rio Group, said that, bearing in mind the goals of adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements development in an urbanizing world, those countries had issued a declaration incorporating their firm commitment to enhancing human dignity and assuring present and future generations of secure and stable living conditions. In addition, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 47/180, they had prepared national reports, established national committees with broad-based participation and made specific proposals and firm commitments regarding housing and human settlements at the national and international levels.

46. The major accomplishments of the Istanbul Conference included recognition of the importance of the participation of all partners and of coordination. Equally important were the work accomplished at the regional and subregional levels and the recognition of the need to take into account different legal systems and varying circumstances in implementing the Habitat Agenda. The countries members of the Rio Group believed that South-South cooperation would contribute to the successful implementation of their housing and human settlement plans. However, new modalities for international cooperation, association, coordination and investment were needed to support national efforts.

47. The General Assembly should be the principal body responsible for adopting and evaluating policies relating to the follow-up to Habitat II. The Economic and Social Council should oversee the general coordination of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda throughout the United Nations system and formulate recommendations thereon. The Commission on Human Settlements should facilitate, review, ensure follow-up on and evaluate progress made towards achieving the objectives of adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements development.

48. The Rio Group believed that the organizations of the United Nations system should continue to be guided by the agreements reached at the recent major international conferences organized by the United Nations and, in so doing,

should build on commitments already reached and avoid reopening debates which would undermine the negotiations and understandings arrived at at those conferences. The question of human settlement should be periodically reviewed by the various bodies of the United Nations system in order to build on the success of the Istanbul Conference and sustain the momentum generated with a view to achieving adequate shelter for all and enabling people to live decent lives.

49. Mr. BIAOU (Benin) said his country considered that the right to shelter meant that every family, as the basic unit of society, had the right to adequate shelter. Like all other fundamental human rights and freedoms that right was inalienable, universal and indivisible. It was essential to maintain a balance between urban development and rural development. The attainment of the goals established at Habitat II required determination, political will, creativity and the effective mobilization of substantial new and additional financial resources.

50. He recalled a number of significant steps taken by the General Assembly after the first United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat), which had heightened the international community's awareness of the problems of human settlements and the need for adequate shelter. However, expectations and circumstances had changed considerably since 1976. In order to ensure that the Habitat Agenda did not become a compendium of wishful thinking, it was necessary to implement it as well as the various programmes of action adopted at the major international conferences organized by the United Nations since 1990. In view of the immense problems faced by the developing countries, especially the African countries and the least developed countries, emphasis must be placed on ensuring adequate international cooperation to support national efforts.

51. The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements should be provided with the human, financial and material resources it needed to carry out its mandate. The Commission on Human Settlements should be restructured and made more dynamic by opening its proceedings to participants other than Government representatives on an agreed basis and by scheduling annual sessions of that body. Voluntary contributions to the United Nations Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation should be increased. The Centre's partnership with the private sector and other elements of civil society should be expanded and consolidated. The full and effective implementation of the Habitat Agenda must be promoted at all levels. Lastly, it was important to monitor and evaluate progress, take note of obstacles and failures and periodically recommend any new measures and initiatives needed to make implementation of the Agenda more dynamic. The future of the entire world depended on finding just and lasting solutions to the challenges and problems of human settlements in rural and urban areas.

52. Mr. N'DOW (Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II)) said he had taken particular note of the recommendations made by the representative of Benin at the end of his statement, in particular, the suggestion to broaden participation in the Commission on Human Settlements in order to meet the new challenges of human settlements development.

53. Mr. HIDAYAT (Indonesia) said it was of critical importance that the commitments made at Habitat II to implement the global plan of action should now be seriously pursued, through concrete action to vigorously redress the formidable problems of human shelter and settlements. The call to action on human settlements made at the first United Nations Conference on Human Settlements had been largely neglected at the national and international levels. The new partnership approach emphasized in Istanbul should, if faithfully implemented, go a long way towards ensuring that the global plan of action was successfully implemented.

54. Governments should focus on being enabling partners and facilitators by creating and strengthening effective partnerships with a broad spectrum of national and grass-roots groups including local authorities, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, women's and youth groups and the scientific and academic communities. Such partnerships should always be consulted by Governments when they formulated policies for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

55. His delegation agreed that the Agenda should be implemented through bilateral, regional and international cooperation, including cooperation with the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions. Without an enabling external environment, national economic growth and development would face insurmountable constraints and implementation of the Agenda would be jeopardized. It was therefore essential that the core issues of development, development finance, external debt, international trade and the transfer of technology should be vigorously addressed. In particular, the international community should fulfil its commitments with respect to financial and technical cooperation.

56. In response to Habitat II, the Indonesian Government had begun to implement its human settlements plan of action and had established machinery to coordinate and monitor the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. The right to housing, which had been incorporated in domestic legislation since 1992, was understood to mean that every citizen had the right to and responsibility for decent shelter as well as the right fully to participate in housing development. The Government had worked to strengthen its role of enabler and facilitator in order to mobilize the efforts of all interested parties in society.

57. Given the acute need for strong institutional measures to monitor, review and assess the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, the Commission on Human Settlements should be strengthened and the Centre for Human Settlements should be the lead agency for implementing the Agenda within the United Nations system. At its current session, the General Assembly should provide the guidance required to enable the Organization to pursue those objectives.

58. Mr. N'DOW (Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II)) noted that, in addition to the Bretton Woods institutions, the regional development banks had played a major role in the preparatory process for the Conference and in support of urban development and infrastructure. He noted also that the private sector in Indonesia had made a major contribution to the field of housing and urban development in that country.

59. Mr. FREEDMAN (International Labour Organization (ILO)) said that, as the last in a series of major United Nations conferences dealing with people-centred sustainable development, Habitat II had provided an opportunity for the international community to renew and build on commitments entered into at earlier conferences. For ILO, it was of particular interest that Habitat II had successfully drawn on the World Summit for Social Development, thereby introducing poverty eradication, employment creation and the fight against social exclusion as issues calling for urgent attention at the local level.

60. A major principle of the Habitat Agenda was that the eradication of poverty was essential for sustainable human settlements. The Agenda then tied poverty eradication to the objective agreed at the social development summit, namely "enabling all women and men to attain secure and sustainable livelihoods through freely chosen and productive employment and work". The global plan of action, which sought to create the many new jobs required, especially in urban areas, specifically linked urban economic development to job creation and addressed the positive relationship between shelter and employment. The Habitat agenda called upon Governments, in partnership with employers and workers, to pursue the goal of ensuring quality jobs and safeguarding the basic rights of workers.

61. At the International Symposium on the Future of Urban Employment held in December 1995, ILO had adopted an Urban Employment Charter, which recognized the crucial role of local authorities in creating employment. Practical solutions were offered in the areas of employment-intensive investment policies, harnessing the productive capacity of the urban informal sector, creating an enabling regulatory environment for enterprise development and forging new public and private-sector alliances for employment creation at the local level.

62. In following up those aspects of the Habitat Agenda falling within its mandate, ILO would participate actively in the 1997 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council, which would review follow-up to the Habitat Agenda. In addition, it would continue to participate in the work of the Commission on Human Settlements and coordinate programmes in the fields of shelter and employment. It was also incorporating key elements of the Habitat Agenda into the work of the Task Force on Employment and Sustainable Livelihoods of the Administrative Committee on Coordination.

63. The particular focus of Habitat II on the local and urban level ensured that the world community had a broad and comprehensive blueprint for people-centred development. The building blocks were in place, and ILO wished to join other partners in helping to shape a better world.

64. Mr. FERJANČIČ (Slovenia) said that his Government was seeking an ongoing partnership with non-governmental organizations, financial institutions and local authorities in its efforts to promote sustainable land-use planning. Slovenia was currently modernizing its national legislation in the areas of building and physical planning in order to harmonize it with legislation in the rest of Europe and to promote the balanced development of its human settlements. The final documents of the Habitat II Conference had been widely circulated in Slovenia and had been taken into account in that legislative process. The Government was in the process of preparing a national economic and social development strategy, a national environmental action plan and national housing

programme. It had set a target of 1998 for the preparation of its national Habitat Agenda.

65. To Slovenia, the interdependence of urban and rural areas was among the most important topics highlighted in the Habitat Agenda. Some 80 per cent of the country's population lived in settlements of fewer than 20,000 people, and polycentric development of settlements had resulted in a more equal distribution of employment opportunities and less disparity in living conditions between urban and rural areas. Slovenia was also experiencing some rather disturbing population trends: over 40 per cent of its towns were losing population, while 20 per cent had remained stagnant for some time, and the migration of young people from the predominantly rural mountain regions to the cities had led to an unfavourable age distribution and an erosion of the cultural landscape in those regions. Yet in many ways, the quality of life in urban areas was lower than that in rural areas. Municipal services in small settlements could be an attractive area for private initiative.

66. In his delegation's view, the development of small and medium-sized settlements must be a priority in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. An effective transport system was also an important instrument for sustainable development and could prevent the loss of agricultural lands surrounding urban areas and slow migration to large cities.

67. Mr. ACEMAH (Uganda) said that, in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, the critical economic and social conditions in some countries and those countries' need for substantial external support should be taken into account. Uganda welcomed the innovative partnerships that had been created to implement the Agenda. Governments and the United Nations system would continue to play a key role, however, as the guarantors of the enabling environment and providers of the resources needed by local authorities, the private sector, civil society and non-governmental organizations in order to translate the Agenda into reality.

68. Uganda agreed that the Centre for Human Settlements should be designated the focal point for implementation of the Agenda. The mandate and functions of the Commission on Human Settlements must also be reviewed and strengthened, given the increased workload as a result of Habitat II. Uganda fully endorsed the actions recommended to the General Assembly in paragraph 47 of the Secretary-General report (A/51/384).

The meeting rose at 5.30 p.m.